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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 NASSAU 000153

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2014

TAGS: BF CA PGOV PREL SMIG SNAR UK

SUBJECT: TURKS AND CAICOS: HAITIAN INFLUX THREATENS PARADISE

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE ROBERT M. WITAJEWSKI FOR REASONS 1.

4 (B) AND (D).

Action Request for Embassy Ottawa: See Paragraph 17.

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SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) Charge, NAS, CONS, USCG, and DEA officers visited Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) January 20-23, 2004 and met with the Governor, Chief Minister, other cabinet members and senior civil servants and law enforcement personnel. TCI officials were unanimous in fearing further degradation of the political-economic situation in Haiti and a consequent Haitian outflow to TCI that the country would be unable to deal with. Embassy reassured TCI officials that they will further strengthen illegal drug and alien interdiction programs through OPBAT and provide information about developments in Haiti that might impact their country. Demand for consular services resulted in a vastly oversubscribed appointment list. Charge appeared on three national television and radio programs.

End Summary

Illegal Haitian Immigration -- Problem No.1 in TCI

¶2. (U) Charge, accompanied by DEA, CONS, NAS, USCG, and OPBAT officials, visited Turks and Caicos Islands for meetings with government officials and media January 20 - 23, 2004, on consular and OPBAT related issues. The Turks and Caicos (TCI), although a British colony, are within Embassy Nassau's consular district and TCI is one of the three countries, along with the United States and The Bahamas, participating in OPBAT ("Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos"). Senior TCI officials were unanimous in their view that the political situation in Haiti was in secular deterioration and that TCI would be faced with an onslaught of illegal migrants in the coming months.

¶3. (U) Charge and NAS officer visited several Haitian communities that have arisen on Providenciales in the "Five Cays," "Blue Hills," and "Thompson Cove" areas of the island. Following are a summary of Embassy observations:

-- Border controls are essentially non-existent. Haitians can arrive/depart essentially at will by boat.

-- Slums and solid middle- and upper-class housing for Haitians co-exist. Rooms were being rented to Haitians for \$50 a week.

-- Small shops were ubiquitous with one or more located on the corners of most roads or blocks. The neighborhood entrepreneurs have developed an informal system apportioning inventory so that there was little direct competition. There was also an informal system to maintain uniform prices for products among the shop owners.

-- Few of the (mostly male) adult Haitians we met with spoke English. Haitian children, on the other hand, were rapidly acquiring a TCI accent from their schooling. Haitian children, again being allowed schooling, appeared eager in the mornings to depart for school, and equally happy returning from schools homework in hand.

-- Even the Haitian ghettos were quite crime free, nor was there a crime problem in nearby multi-million dollar ex-pat residences.

-- As with The Bahamas, work for illegal Haitian immigrants in the construction and service industries of TCI was readily available.

A Cabinet of Worried Ministers

¶4. (C) Charge met privately January 22 with Michael Missick, Chief (Prime) Minister of the Islands, at his oceanfront residence in the upper-class "Leeward" section of Providenciales. Chief Minister Missick made the following points during the meeting:

-- Appreciation for the support from OPBAT and reiteration

of the Government's commitment to contribute 10 percent of the cost for replacing the deteriorated housing used by OPBAT personnel on Great Inagua OPBAT base.

-- The influx of large numbers of Haitians into TCI presents serious health, cultural, financial, and national security concerns.

-- The Government is worried about the "revolving door" in which repatriated Haitian migrants return to TCI within weeks of being deported. The cost of the "merry-go-round" is seriously impacting on the government's budget.

-- The Government is unhappy with London's response to the migration situation. Because London considers the Haitian problem to be an immigration, not a national security issue, it is not providing the TCI Government with financial support to defray the expense of either enforcement or repatriation.

-- A promise to move quickly to implement machine readable passports for TCI passports as a first step in reducing border porosity.

Give Us Pre-Clearance, Please

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**15.** (U) Chief Minister Missick argued forcefully for establishment of pre-clearance facilities in Providenciales. He noted that 80 percent of the 165,000 yearly visitors were U.S. citizens arriving and departing on U.S. carriers. The Chief Minister also argued that on a percentage basis, TCIers probably had one of the highest percentages rates of visitation to the United States to study, shop, and seek medical attention.

**16.** (U) The Chief Minister also argued strongly for establishment of a permanent U.S. consular presence in Providenciales to both assist U.S. citizens, as well as to provide visa services. He argued that TCI residents spent more per capita in the United States than citizens of any other country while complaining that having to travel to Nassau for visas was both time-consuming and expensive, requiring a minimum of a two-night stay. He indicated that his government considered a regular U.S. consular presence of such importance, that it would consider absorbing a significant percentage of the cost of building a security facility for Embassy personnel.

**17.** (U) Charge reviewed security, budgetary, and personnel limitations that made establishment of either a permanent Embassy consular presence or a pre-clearance facility in the near term unlikely.

**18.** (SBU) Chief Minister also raised the concerns of his government regarding both issuance of A and G visas for official travel, as well as airport courtesies for him and members of his cabinet. Charge responded citing the various procedures in place in the Embassy that assured that most applicants received visas within one hour of paying the application fee, promised that the Embassy would do all necessary to facilitate rapid issuance of visas for official travel, and reviewed the steps that the British Embassy in Washington would need to take to arrange for airport courtesies and special security handling for TCI cabinet members.

Senior Officials Share Chief Minister's Concerns

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**19.** (C) In a separate meeting chaired by the TCI senior civil servant, Acting Permanent Secretary William Clare, with Charge, DEA and OPBAT officials, Mr. Clare and a group of senior TCI police and immigration officials:

-- Were effusive in praise of the assistance that they have been receiving from the U.S. while asking for an even greater OPBAT and Coast Guard presence.

-- Reiterated their belief that Haitian migrants were almost exclusively economically, not politically, motivated.

-- Insisted that the country was approaching a saturation point in accepting Haitians. While "we can hardly blame them for trying to escape (Haiti)...we in TCI simply cannot accommodate them at the rate they are coming in," Clare declared. Clare estimated that there were 15,000 illegal Haitians residing in a country of 30,000 citizens and only 6,500 registered voters.

-- Repeated concerns that the country's social services, schools, medical facilities, and public health were at risk. Officials noted that a majority of all pregnant mothers in the country were illegal Haitians.

-- Requested an additional USCG presence between TCI and

Haiti to interdict both illegal drugs and illegal aliens.

¶10. (C) TCI officials told Embassy officials that they would need at least three additional ocean-going vessels to have any impact deterring Haitian immigration to TCI. TCI police also noted that they currently have only one functioning blue water vessel.

¶11. (U) TCI officials also indicated that because of their limited resources and on-island expertise in criminal investigations, they would like additional Embassy assistance in interceding with the FBI and other U.S. law enforcement agencies in doing criminal checks, providing forensics experts for investigations, and assistance and training in detection of forged documents including passports, visas, and U.S. currency.

Governor: Some Similar -- and Some Different -- Concerns

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¶12. (C) In a private meeting with Governor Jim Poston, First Secretary David Peate, his chief deputy, Governor Poston made

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the following points to Charge, DEA, and OPBAT officials from the Embassy:

-- Inquired if the Embassy was aware of a proposal of a Canadian member of parliament to make TCI a "freely associated state" with Canada and asked how seriously Charge considered such a proposal.

-- Noted that if TCI decided to formally declare independence from the United Kingdom, London would interpose no objections as long as there was a sufficient transition period to arrange the transfer and assurances were received regarding assumption from the UK of TCI's legal and financial obligations.

-- Noted that London was no longer providing any capital contributions to TCI and believed that the TCI government should be entirely self-financed.

-- Praised the current level of cooperation and assistance to TCI being provided by OPBAT.

-- Expressed concern about the honesty and integrity of some senior TCI law enforcement officials. Embassy DEA officials responded that they were not aware that any confidential drug information provided to TCI officials had been compromised.

-- Noted that because of the islands' small population, getting a jury to convict TCI citizens of certain crimes such as drug trafficking was "problematical." For that reason, Governor Poston continued, he had no objection to arrests and trials of traffickers in other jurisdictions such as the United States or The Bahamas.

-- Expressed concern that the drug problem/drug wealth in TCI was growing, but acknowledged that evidence was, at this point, still mostly anecdotal.

-- Pointed out that since TCI had no national development plan, opinions about the presence of illegal Haitians was mixed. He wryly observed that contractors, builders, and developers welcomed cheap Haitian labor even while decrying the threat to TCI society that they posed. The compartmentalization of opinions about Haitians was such that even organizing a forthcoming police raid of illegal Haitians working in Providenciales had been complex and time-consuming.

-- Acknowledged that the country continued to side-step the issue of the legal status of Haitians born in TCI and whether or not to admit them as TCI "belongers."

-- Agreed to work with telephone provider Cable and Wireless to provide OPBAT with a wire and cellphone monitoring capability as new technologies were introduced.

Police and Immigration: Drugs, Terrorists, and Haitians

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¶13. (C) TCI Police Commissioner Paul Harvey admitted to Embassy officials that the Turks and Caicos had "essentially open borders." He was concerned about reports that Haitians were building vessels to depart their country if political instability threatens, that Colombian drug cartels were stockpiling drugs in Haiti for shipment through TCI and The Bahamas to the United States, and a growing incidence of Haitian sloops being used for dual purpose cargoes: illegal drugs and illegal migrants. Other points made by Harvey included:

-- An apparent concentration of drug smuggling activities on Providenciales where it is much easier for both drugs and illegal migrants

to integrate into an already large Haitian community vice Grand Turk where newcomers "would immediately stand out."

-- Recognition of heightened post 9-11 security concerns and the impact on TCI of a terrorist incident, but lack of resources to conduct even minimal background checks on airport employees.

-- Frustration from a lack of intelligence within the Haitian community due to an inability to recruit confidential sources.

**¶14.** (C) Senior Immigration officials echoed Harvey's concerns and Government fears of a worsening situation in Haiti. Asked how TCI would cope with a sudden influx of new migrants, officials responded candidly, "Call the Embassy and turn to the United States for help." OPBAT/Coast Guard officers reviewed recent activities by the USCG to interdict illegal migrants and USCG plans for an increased presence in the region in the coming months. Officials complained that they had only daylight operating capability with the result being that most illegal Haitian migrants now arrived, undetected, in TCI at night.

Public Outreach

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**¶15.** (U) Embassy officials spent significant time in public outreach. Charge was interviewed for 10 minutes on the national news and separately for 20 minutes for a new interview program on bilateral relations, the situation in Haiti and Embassy consular services to TCI. In addition, Charge and Consular Chief spent over an hour being interviewed and responding to callers' questions on policy, immigration, and visa questions on the country's national TV and radio network.

Comment

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**¶16.** (C) If the Bahamians are anxious and concerned about the impact of a large illegal Haitian presence in their country, citizens of the Turks and Caicos, with less than 10 percent of the population of The Bahamas, are petrified. They fear the imminent loss of their cultural identity and, perhaps, political control of their country. But, like their neighbors to the North, they do not know how to resolve the problem. Even were they willing to increase taxes to acquire additional resources, a country of 30,000 could never create the impermeable boundary that would be required. And, like The Bahamas, TCI would have trouble functioning without the presence of inexpensive "gastarbiter" who perform the essential manual labor that drives the construction and service industries that are the country's economic foundation.

Action Request

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**¶17.** (SBU) Embassy would appreciate Embassy Ottawa's analysis of the seriousness -- or lack thereof -- and prospects of success of a Canadian MP's plan to offer TCI "freely-associated" status with Canada that some within the TCI Government see as possible solution to many of their immediate financial and migration problems.

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